



Questions for Book Clubs

1. Many women of Ruth's generation were forced into relinquishing their babies for adoption. Compare the way this was handled for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, and the different experiences Dawn and Ruth had in having their children taken from them.
2. What's your understanding of how widespread this practice was, and the reasons behind it? Do you think Western culture outwardly lauds the family unit while in some cases working against it?
3. What does this novel say about the attitudes to having and raising children in both white and First Nations cultures? Consider also Dossie's comments to Ruth in chapter 25 on the disrespect she thinks Ruth's daughters show her.
4. The thrust of the novel is how secrets are dealt with in families. Do you see elements of your own family dynamics in Ruth's?
5. Do you think white Australia has accepted that addiction is an illness, or is it still largely regarded as something to be punished?

6. Discuss the different reactions of Ruth's three youngest daughters when they learn they have a half-sister – and then that she is Dawn.
7. What questions does the novel raise about the differences between siblings in a family?
8. Discuss the way in which *Secrets* spotlights intergenerational trauma and how it spirals through the years.
9. Do any of the views Dossie expresses make you think again about Black deaths in custody? Consider in particular chapter 23 in respect of this.
10. Many social injustices are woven into this novel's storyline, including dispossession and disenfranchisement, judicial corruption, police brutality, the harassment of Indigenous people, homelessness; it also looks at the activism that grew in response to those things. Which of these aspects of the novel affected you the most?
11. *Secrets* is also rich in themes: trust and mistrust, lying, truth-telling, courage, shame, openness, bigotry, fear, loneliness, trauma, the healing powers of kindness and the natural world . . . Which are most powerful for you?
12. Consider the abuse that Hamish suffered before being imprisoned, and his reaction to it. Why do you think this strand of the story is important in the novel?
13. Discuss the change in Dossie's opinion of Ruth, and the reasons for the change.
14. In the letter Ruth leaves for her family at the end of the novel, she writes that Rob would have understood about her first family, but that she didn't have enough trust. Why didn't she, do you think?
15. What is the significance of the lilly pillies in Ruth's garden?